

POKO PERFINS

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In issue 227 Tony Edwards treats the problem of British perfins from coils. He says that "the vast majority of stamps with upright watermark and clipped perf had unusual letters. It is difficult to explain why they are unusual but a glance at the illustration below shows what I mean." I would like to shed some more light on these "unusual letters". All illustrated perfins and hundreds more are products of the so-called Poko franking machine and usually they are called Poko perfins. Their main characteristics are: 1) height five holes or 6 mm, 2) square look and 3) seriffed letters I, J, L, T and Z. Generally there are no varieties of size and shape of the same letters from different dies. This is due to the fact that their manufacturer used a template to speed-up the production of the perforators.

The Poko machine is a hand operated stamp affixing device with a capacity up to six coils of stamps (of different value). By shifting a pointer to the required value of stamp to be affixed and operating a crank, the machine cuts one stamp from the coil, perfins it, moistens and affixes to the envelope or postcard. The capacity is said to be up to 120 pieces of mail per minute !

The name POKO stands for Porto Kontroll Kasse which translates in English as Postage Control Till. These machines were first built by Messrs Goebel of Darmstadt, Germany soon after the World War I.

Poko franking machines were largely used in Germany but we come across Poko perfins also on Belgian, British, Danish, Dutch, French, Spanish, Swedish and Swiss stamps. There was an unsuccessful attempt to introduce them to Czechoslovakia. Tony Edwards rightly pointed out that the perfinning of stamps used in Poko machines was a rather pointless operation as their construction prevented to some extent the misuse of firm's stamps (the machine could be locked, too).

Nevertheless the Poko Machines did their service for quite a long time before being gradually replaced by other types of franking machines. Can any reader report if they are still in use in Britain ?

The Poko perfins, however, pose one problem. As usual, the user of a Poko perfin can be identified using a cover with the user's address and a perfined stamp affixed to it. Thus far, all is well, but if we take a loose stamp with the same die (in Poko letters) we cannot be sure it was used by the same company. On German stamps, especially, we find many Poko perfins with the identical die and postmarks from different towns, and not always from branches of a company. But this difficulty makes the collecting of Poko perfins more challenging.

More information on the Poko machine and Poko perfins on the Dutch stamps (with a detailed catalogue of them) will be found by interested readers in the excellent handbook Poko issues of the Netherlands by Burton E. Bauder (NPS Monograph Series, No. 3) published in the USA in 1974.

(The Catalogue Editor tells us a small specialist group has been set up to study POKO perfins world wide, together with other perfined coil stamps. The group is to produce worksheets free to members and 10p/page to others. To become a member of the group simply supply information to it. Contact via the Perfin Society Catalogue Editor at the address on page 1.....Ed.)